NORTHERN ALBERTA DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS IN NORTHERN ALBERTA

REPORT ON COMMUNITY/MEDICAL STUDENT INTERCHANGE MEETINGS

January, 1984

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Alberta
NORTHERN ALBERTA
DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

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January, 1984

The Northern Alberta Development Council is pleased to provide this summary report on the November, 1983 Calgary and Edmonton Interchange meetings held to attract prospective medical practitioners to northern Alberta.

The Council was created to advise the provincial government and assist northern citizens in "practical measures to foster and advance development in northern Alberta". Much of the NADC's work focusses on the delivery of services to northern residents. Health care is seen as one of the most essential of these services.

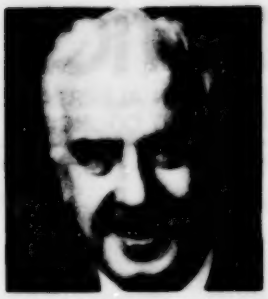
In the past number of years, one of the most important issues in northern health care has been the attraction and retention of a sufficient number of medical doctors. After follow-up to a number of important concerns arising from the NADC-sponsored Health Needs in Northern Alberta Workshop in 1980, the Council felt it was timely to address the continuing need to attract more doctors to the north.

After extensive review, two Interchange meetings were convened in Calgary and Edmonton to bring together interested northern community representatives and medical students and interns. Some 60 northern community delegates met with over 175 prospective practitioners, and a number of definite follow-up commitments were made. All of the participants found the Interchanges to be very worthwhile and the Northern Alberta Development Council is examining the possibility of repeating them in future years.

Norm A. Weiss, MLA
Chairman

NORTHERN ALBERTA DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL 1983/84

NORM WEISS, MLA
CHAIRMAN
FT. McMURRAY



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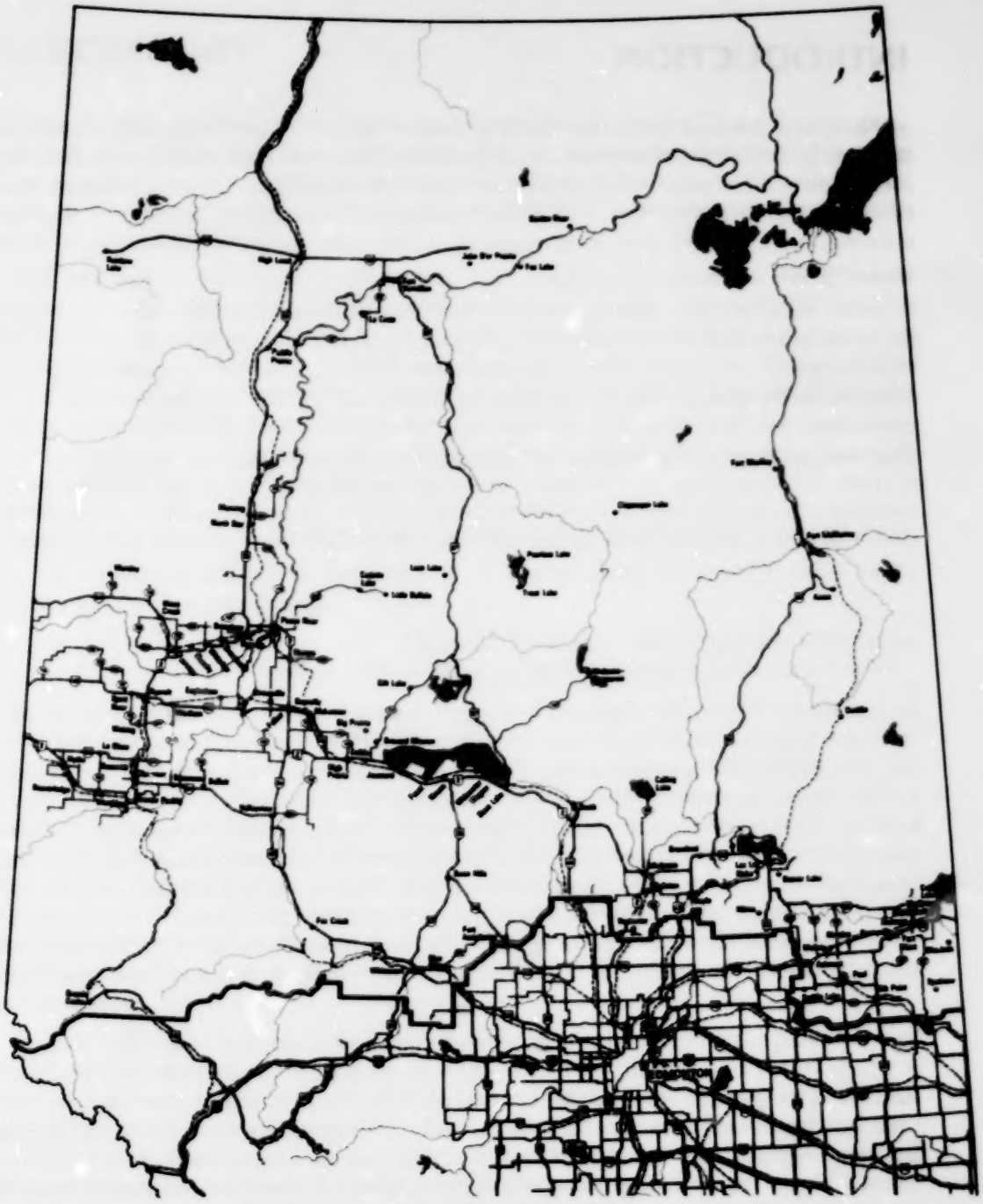

NORTHERN ALBERTA DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL AREA

PRIMARY HIGHWAY SECONDARY ROAD RAILWAY

INTRODUCTION

Northern Alberta has long had a problem attracting and retaining a sufficient number of skilled professionals. It is a problem that the Northern Alberta Development Council has addressed often, extensively reviewing such issues as labour force turnover, cost of living, highly-qualified manpower projections, adult education and training, health needs and, most recently, factors affecting the supply of physicians and dentists.

In its many public meetings across northern Alberta since 1973, the Council has become aware that, in particular, an adequate supply of health care professionals is a vital necessity to many northern communities. A number of communities have come forward with specific briefs requesting assistance in the recruitment of health personnel. Medical doctors were the most often required — either to fill an urgent shortage or to relieve existing physician workloads. Because of what appeared to be chronic understaffing in this area, in a number of northern communities over a number of years, the Northern Alberta Development Council decided in early 1983 to undertake special measures to recruit medical practitioners to northern Alberta.

BACKGROUND

In the briefs submitted to the Northern Alberta Development Council requesting assistance in recruiting medical practitioners, many communities indicated they were spending a fair amount of time and money recruiting on their own, but with limited results. A number of communities sought doctors from as far away as Great Britain and New Zealand/Australia.

This individual community effort and the continuing need for recruitment assistance was one of a number of major issues addressed in the Council's 1980 *Health Needs in Northern Alberta* study. As part of the research, a workshop of northerners and interested professionals was held in St. Paul. Of the 36 recommendations to the Government of Alberta covering northern health issues, the following dealt with staffing and personnel recruitment:

- Incentive systems should be examined to attract and retain health care professionals in the north.
- There is an acute need to attract dentists and doctors to underserviced areas.
- Increased staffing is required at the local level in specific areas (e.g., alcoholism treatment).
- Particular need exists for more psychiatric care on a regularly scheduled basis and more flexible staff utilization in the mental health care field.*

In subsequent follow-up to the workshop, the Council met with the Minister of Social Services and Community Health and the Minister of Hospitals and Medical Care. There have also been several meetings with departmental officials to provide advice and assistance with regard to program delivery adjustments as a result of the Council's recommendations. The Northern Alberta Development Council has also separately addressed a number of specific northern health care issues since the major 1980 review. These included a workshop on strategies to deal with alcoholism, and position papers concerning northern mental health service needs, elderly care, and rural ambulance services. Recent concern from northern communities resulted in the Council setting a current follow-up priority on the recruitment of needed health care personnel.

In early 1983, the Council completed a review of factors affecting the placement of physicians and dentists, focussing on strategies for recruitment and retention.** A decision was made to concentrate, initially, on the recruitment of physicians. Various approaches and assistance programs in use across Canada were examined and after detailed review, the Council agreed, as a first step, to sponsor Interchange meetings between interested northern Alberta communities and medical students and interns. The Interchanges were held on November 28, 1983 in Calgary and November 29, 1983 in Edmonton.

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* *Health Needs in Northern Alberta - Workshop Report, NADC, 1980.*

** *A Study of Factors Affecting the Supply of Physicians and Dentists in Northern Alberta, Hickling-Johnston Ltd., 1983.*

THE INTERCHANGES

Purpose

The purpose of the two Interchanges was to bring together northern Alberta community representatives and prospective medical doctors to discuss opportunities for practices in the north. The objectives were to show that northern Alberta is an excellent place to live and work, and that modern medical facilities and resources are available to physicians. A prospectus was prepared by the Council describing the north and outlining career opportunities in various northern communities.*

Invitees

The Council invited all communities in northern Alberta with existing or proposed hospital facilities to participate. Individual notices were sent to town councils, chambers of commerce and hospital boards. Twenty-one of the 30 communities notified responded positively. The Council provided the confirmed attendees with advice and assistance regarding the preparation of a presentation and the co-ordination of their community resources for the events. Communities were further advised that local physicians could make a strong contribution to the community recruitment team.

From the Faculties of Medicine at the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta in Edmonton, some 750 doctors-in-training were invited. Letters were sent to students in their last two years of medicine, interns at the city hospitals and residents preparing for a specialty in family practice or in one of the ten specialties needed in northern Alberta. All existing medical practitioners, of course, were welcome at the Interchanges; these were informed by news media releases and notices placed in the medical schools and city hospitals. Because of Council's recognition of the importance family factors play in a person's career decisions, a special effort was made to include spouses and partners of prospective doctors.

Logistics

The two Alberta faculties of medicine, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the Alberta Medical Association, the Alberta Hospital Association, the Conference on Rural Health Care, Edmonton and Calgary hospital medical directors, Alberta Hospitals and Medical Care officials, and select medical practitioners were all contacted for their advice and support. The response was excellent and many of those contacted participated actively both before and during the Interchanges.

The two events were organized as informal wine and cheese receptions: in Calgary at a faculty hall and in Edmonton at a downtown hotel. The Northern Alberta Development Council paid for the receptions and a charter bus between Edmonton and Calgary. The participating northern communities prepared displays about their community and its medical facilities and services, and arranged transportation for its delegation to Edmonton.

At each event, the Chairman of the Northern Alberta Development Council, Norm Weiss, MLA, Lac La Biche-McMurray, provided introductory comments

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* *Opportunities for Medical Practitioners in Northern Alberta - Prospectus*, NADC, 1983.

followed by a short address given by a practising physician from northern Alberta. The three-hour sessions then allowed prospective doctors to move freely about the display area and meet with various community representatives.

Results

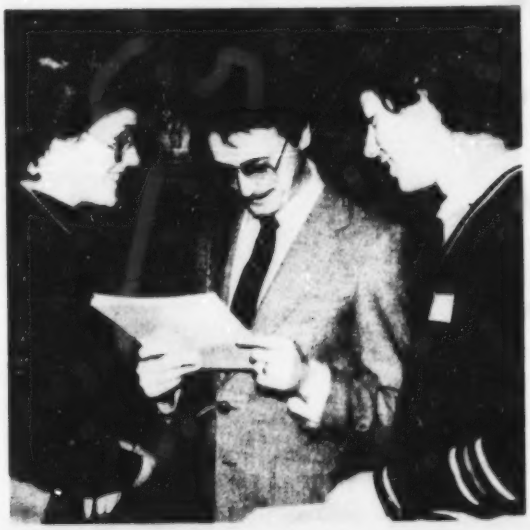
In Calgary, 83 medical students, interns and residents attended the first Interchange, many of them accompanied by their spouse or partner. In Edmonton, 94 registered for the evening session, and again, many brought their spouse or partner. Twenty-one community groups set up displays at the two sessions, with a total of over 60 northern community representatives in attendance.

In the opinion of the Northern Alberta Development Council, the Interchanges were very successful. The two basic objectives were met: misconceptions about northern Alberta as a place to live and work were destroyed (many guests came truly unaware of the region), and the many medical practice opportunities available were made evident and discussed. It was the general concensus of all the community representatives that the prospective doctors were impressed by what they heard and saw. Furthermore, all the communities came away from the Interchanges with the names of some interested candidates. Many communities felt that, as a result of the Interchanges, they would definitely be successful in recruiting more doctors to the north.

There was, however, no illusion that events such as the Interchanges alone could reduce the doctor shortage in northern Alberta. Many delegates felt that it would take more interchange-type events, continuing recruitment activity by the communities on their own with specific candidates, and a further co-ordination role by a so-called neutral body — a role which could perhaps be filled for a while by the Northern Alberta Development Council. The need was also felt for a concerted effort by government and the authorities affecting medical practices, to encourage and support programs leading to doctor recruitment and retention.

SPIRIT RIVER

GOLD LAKE
GRAND CENTRE



MARKING

FOLLOW-UP

At a two-hour feedback session, the northern community delegates met with members of the Northern Alberta Development Council to discuss recruitment strategies and ways to improve possible future interchanges. A general concensus was reached that special programs are needed to assist in attracting and retaining medical practitioners in the more remote rural areas of Alberta. The delegates also provided ideas for the Northern Alberta Development Council to pursue with the provincial government, the faculties of medicine and medical professional organizations. A short summary of the strategy session is provided below.

Recruiting and Retaining Medical Practitioners - Ideas for Review

a)	Initiatives a community can take	• Establish medical needs committees to recruit doctors and to assist them and their families to adjust to their new locale
		• Support local physicians in attracting doctors for locum tenens
		• Make loans available to new doctors
		• Provide a housing subsidy for a period of time
		• Purchase and maintain a medical clinic
b)	Hospital "satellites"	• Have each Edmonton hospital provide personnel and support services to specific hospitals in northern Alberta
c)	Student bursaries	• Direct more NADC student bursaries to students of medicine
d)	Internships	• Provide more opportunities for interns to undertake a portion of their work in northern Alberta
e)	Faculties of Medicine	• Explore opportunities for medical students to do more electives in northern Alberta
f)	Provincial Government	• Consider implementing a financial incentive plan for practitioners in remote locations, modelled on the British Columbia Incentive Program which provides a 5-20% premium on medical payments in certain regions
g)	Interchanges	• Make them an annual event, at least for the next few years

COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES

ATHABASCA	Tony Schinkinger, Mayor Bill Kostiw, Hospital Board Eunice Comchi, Hospital Board Hal Harrison, Chamber of Commerce
BONNYVILLE	Ray Prevost, Town Councillor Simon Dallaire, Hospital Administrator Dr. J.P. Bugeaud, Local Physician
COLD LAKE/GRAND CENTRE	Richard Welsh, Hospital Board Bill Barnes, Hospital Board Ron Young, Hospital Board
FAIRVIEW/WHITELAW	Mabel Beck, Hospital Board Jim MacGregor, Hospital Administrator Doug Lindskoog, Town Councillor Dr. Doug Snider, Local Physician
FORT McMURRAY	Alice Haxton, Chamber of Commerce Geoff Weber, Hospital Administrator Dr. M.M. Parmer, Local Physician Dr. G. Horner, Local Physician
FORT VERMILION	Marilyn Foster, Northwest Health & Social Services Board Dr. Jane Gainer, Local Physician
FOX CREEK	Bernard Hornby, Mayor Nick Ozoroff, Town Manager Don Zabloski, Hospital Administrator
GLENDON	John Doonanco, Mayor James MacDonald, Hospital Board Alex Smyl, Hospital Administrator
GRIMSHAW/BERWYN	Bob Nay, Hospital Board Joe Reyda, Hospital Board Ray Rondeau, Town Manager Carmen Johnson, Conference on Rural Health Care
LAC LA BICHE	Dick Meardi, Hospital Board Lynne Lambert, Town Councillor Moe LeBlanc, Regional Economic Development Council
MANNING	Del Harbourne, Mayor G.E. Murrant, Hospital Board Dr. I. Halinen, Local Physician

PEACE RIVER	Florence Grimble, Hospital Board John Veillet, Hospital Administrator Ken Burkholder, Economic Development Board Peder Lodoen, Economic Development Board Frank Lovsin, Economic Development Board Dr. Karen Lundgard, Local Physician
SLAVE LAKE	Stella Boisvert, Hospital Board Herman Hoffman, Town Councillor Dr. Jacob Barsky, Local Physician
SMOKY RIVER REGION (McLellan/Falher)	Ron Schuster, Chamber of Commerce Roger Swetnam, Regional Economic Development Council Mariette Pelland, Local Clinic Claudette Meardi, Local Clinic Dr. Barry Pelland, Local Physician
SPIRIT RIVER	Verna Block, Mayor Dr. Erv Block, Local Physician
SWAN HILLS	Wilber Peters, Town Councillor Rina Teske, Town Councillor Lynn Stocking, Town Manager Joan Butler, Chamber of Commerce
VALLEYVIEW	Duane Dutka, Manager Trudy Halabisky, Town Councillor Randy Aubie, Chamber of Commerce Ben Boyce, Hospital Administrator
WABASCA-DESMARAIS	William Beaver, Chief Allan Favel, Hospital Board Gloria Favel, Community Representative
MAYERTHORPE *	Barry Hanson, Hospital Board
VILNA *	Netty Moric, Hospital Administrator
NADC	Norm Weiss, Chairman Barry Lazoruk, Vice-Chairman Joanne Mitchell, Member Murray Finnerty, Executive Director Jerry Archibald, Director of Research Roger Jackson, Staff Officer

* Serve areas in NADC region